



Testimony of the Women's Center of Greater Danbury

In Support of HB 5029: An Act Concerning Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence on Campus

Melanie Danyliw, Director of Training & Program Development, Legislative Liaison

Monica Sievel, M.S., Women's Center Campus Advocate at Western Connecticut State University

Kelly Mullins, Program Manager of Education & Outreach

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Senator Cassano, Representative Willis and honorable members of the Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Melanie Danyliw, Director of Training & Program Development and legislative liaison at the Women's Center of Greater Danbury, a member agency of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS) providing sexual assault and domestic violence services throughout upper Fairfield and lower Litchfield counties. I am submitting this testimony with my colleagues, Monica Sievel, our Campus Advocate at Western Connecticut State University, and Kelly Mullins, our Program Manager of Education who provides education and awareness activities on campus. In February of 2007, the university entered into a *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)* with our agency to improve response protocols and provide campus-based education, counseling and advocacy services on our issues. It is within the context of these experiences that we strongly support HB 5029.

Our memorandum of understanding was initiated by a newly-hired, progressive provost who, motivated by the success she had seen at her previous college with such community collaborations, was eager to formalize and, most importantly, expand the services we had already been providing on campus. Significantly, the MOU heightened our agency's credibility and weight on campus as well as provided new opportunities for engagement: Our new CONNSACS-funded campus advocate was enlisted to revise those sections of the student handbook dealing with sexual assault, dating/domestic violence and stalking while our agency was invited to co-chair the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) in order to provide, in both situations, our perspective for improvements, implementation and expansion. In these processes, federal and state laws have been critical in not only defining best practices guidelines and standards but also in exerting pressure for compliance.

Since 2007, we have been making slow but steady progress in this work. Our campus advocate now meets bi-weekly with the Dean of Students, SART convenes monthly to work on alignment with Campus SaVE Act and other laws, and we are exploring adding student representatives to SART to maximize inclusion of student perspectives, experiences and needs. A user-friendly bookmark, widely distributed to students, was developed to clearly outline points of entry into SART; awareness activities that focus on equipping "upstanders" with both the tools to create a culture of nonviolence, equality and healthy gender expectations and strategies for violence-specific risk reduction and prevention are now more eagerly supported - whether in the campus-wide formats of our *Operation Jungle Red* and the new *Where Do You Stand* campaigns or our more small-group focused format such as our dorm-based *Slice of Life* series.

Yet there is significant work still to be done especially in the areas of consistent and inclusive staff training, sexual and interpersonal violence prevention education of all students as part of orientation, increased reporting options, and best practice disciplinary proceedings. In all areas, the ability of the community-based sexual assault and domestic violence agency(ies) to provide insight for the campus, especially within a formalized MOU structure such as we have enjoyed, and the guidance and requirements of laws such as HB 5029 are critical in moving us forward.

Recommendations advanced in HB 5029 provide the tools, guidance and oversight so that improvements that sustain such an environment continue and so we enthusiastically support them. We appreciate the committee's efforts in addressing sexual violence on campus and look forward to the passage of HB 5029.

www.wcogd.org

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES
2 West Street, Danbury, CT 06810
p: 203-731-5200 f: 203-731-5207
womenscenter@wcogd.org

**SEXUAL
ASSAULT
HOTLINE**
203-731-5204

**DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE
HOTLINE**
203-731-5206

**WOMEN'S
CENTER
HELPLINE**
203-731-5200